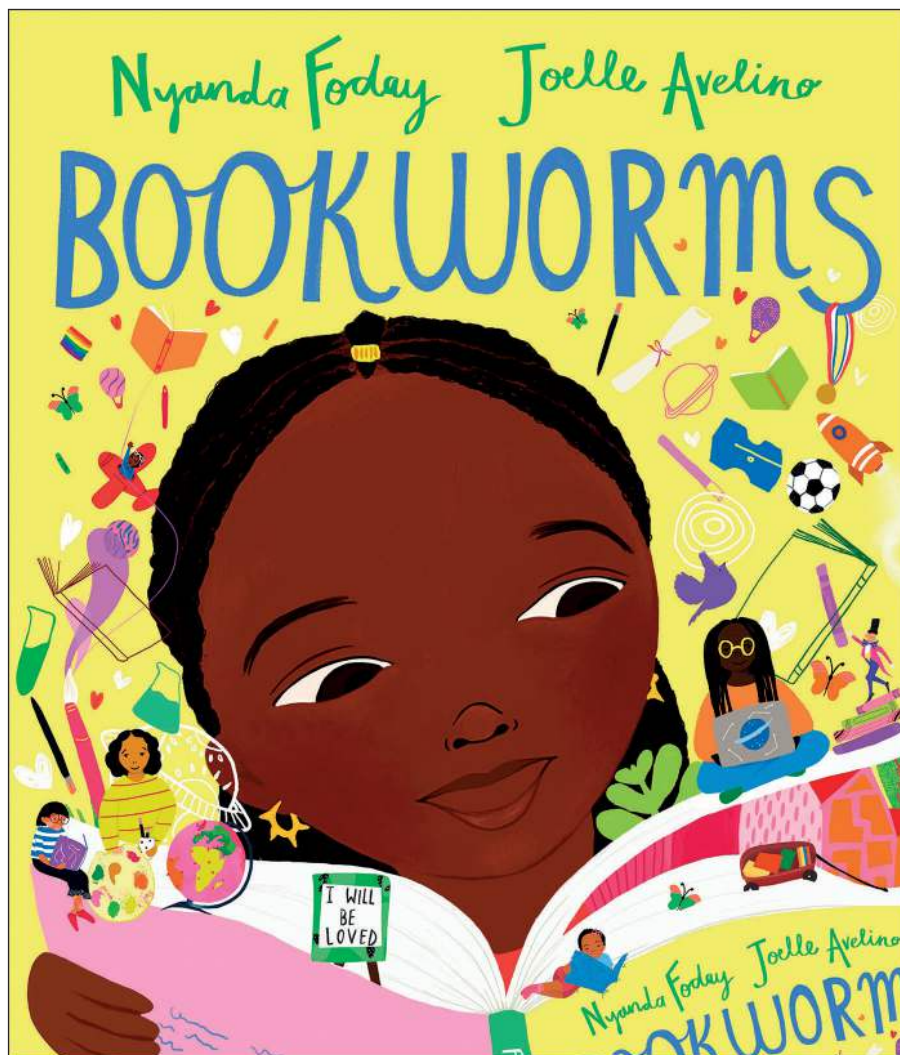


# TEACHING NOTES FOR BOOKWORMS



Written by Nyanda Foday & illustrated by Joelle Avelino  
Published by Andersen Press



These notes have been written by the teachers at the [CLPE](#) to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

These teaching notes have been written with children in Years 5 and 6 in mind, but you will need to differentiate them as appropriate to the needs and experience of your own children.

### Before you start:

- As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. The journal can be a place to capture reflections on the plot, characters and themes, as well as, how the writer uses language for effect.
- As you read, you may also want to encourage the group to pause to consider words and phrases that may or may not be familiar to them and discuss and clarify their meanings and origins. These might include but will not be limited to **cadence**, **protagonist**, **proxy**, **society**, for example. Add these to a glossary, following up on new and unfamiliar vocabulary by using photographs and video sources to bring these words to life and support the pupils in understanding them in context of these stories.
- This book sits within the context of a slowly changing publishing landscape which now recognises the importance of diversity in children's literature. CLPE have been leading the research into whether children's literature reflects the realities of those being taught in modern classrooms across the UK. It revealed that only 4% of children's books published in 2017 featured characters from a minority ethnic background and only 1% being protagonists. You can learn more and benefit from useful guidance by reading [CLPE's Reflecting Realities reports](#) in full.
- Knowing about authors and illustrators can support children to interpret the meanings of text considering the authors intent and viewpoint, as well as helping them to develop their personal reading preferences. The African heritage of both the author and illustrator of this book may resonate with some of your pupils.
  - The author of this book, Nyanda Foday, was a former Birmingham Young Poet Laureate and this book is written in a poetic style. You might want to find out more about Nyanda by visiting this feature in [Birmingham Living \(August 2022\)](#)
  - Joelle Avalino is a Congolese and Angolan Illustrator who grew up in the United Kingdom. To find out more about her and her body of work, visit her [website](#).

### Reading aloud and key talking points:

- Show children the front cover of the book – without yet revealing the title – and ask them to share their overall impressions of the character before scrutinising the image more closely, itemising the objects and images they can identify in the background of the illustration. *How would we describe the girl featured? What is the significance of the objects around her? What do you think this book is going to be about?*
- Now reveal the title and invite the children to share what they think of when they hear the word 'Bookworm'. *Is it a phrase they are familiar with? Do they know the meaning?* Explain that the word **bookworm** is thought to have begun its life as a disparaging term for someone who always has their head stuck in a book, as it refers to the bugs that used to make their homes in books/paper many years ago. Invite the children to share their responses to this as well as what more it tells us about this character.
- Spend some time exploring the banner that says **I will be loved**. *What does this sentence suggest; that she wants to be loved; that she is not loved now; that she is loved and always will be?* Through these initial discussions ensure the children are given time to explore their individual and personal responses to the images on the front cover of the book and that all are valued.
- Show the children the back cover, reading aloud the blurb. What does this mean to them? Do they agree with the assertions about what a **good book** can do? *Why? Why not?*

- Spend some time exploring the reading preferences of children in your class. Begin by modelling how to talk about yourself as a reader; what you enjoy reading now, what you enjoyed reading when you were the children's age. Talk about the times when reading has helped you, either as a child or adult e.g. to relax on holiday; to learn a new skill. Also, highlight the times when reading has affected you emotionally; when do books make you laugh, cry, wonder about the world or your own personal life? Finally, talk about the characters you have most identified with throughout your reading experiences, and why. Ask the children, *if you were a character from a book you have read and enjoyed, who would you be?* Depending on the age and experience of the readers in your class, some children will struggle to talk confidently about their own reading experiences, so have some books to hand that you know the children have read independently, with you, at home, or with a previous teacher.
- Now open the book to reveal the endpaper and then the title page, taking the opportunity to use language associated with literary forms of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, such as anthology, collection, traditional tale, mystery, Sci-Fi, picturebook, biography, atlas, etc. *Which kind of book do the children think the girl will have chosen? What might she be looking for in a book; what theme, subject or character might appeal? What do you hope to find when browsing a bookshelf? Why?*
- Turn to the first spread and read aloud the text on the first page. Invite the children to consider what they think the first line **We grow up looking for ourselves.** means. *If this sentence isn't to be taken literally, then what might it mean? How would we find ourselves 'On phone screens. In movie scenes. In the streets.'* Again, model this concept using your own experience, sharing when you most identified with a particular plotline or character on television or in a film; when you related strongly with someone in your neighbourhood or beyond; when you watched a clip or an advertisement in which you felt an aspect of your life was reflected.
- Invite the children to share when they remember identifying with the real and fictional outside world in such a way. Mediate the discussion to allow this discussion to open up into a chat about the children's identities and characteristics. *What might you be looking for if you were to find themselves in the pages of a book? Do you find this easy to do when browsing? Why? Why not? How does or might it feel if we can't find ourselves reflected back in the community and wider world around us?*
- Read the next passage and focus on the word **cadence**. *What do the children think it might mean? They may know or be able to make sense of the word from the context.* Explain that 'cadence' is the rhythm or beat made by a voice or musical instrument. Metaphorically, the narrator is looking for other people who think and feel the same way, not only talk in the same way. Explore how this relates to both your and the children's own lives.
- Now explore the images around this spread more carefully. *Why has the illustrator chosen them? What or who do they represent? What do the images tell us about what the girl is looking for and where she is looking? Look at the image of the girl with the phone. How is she feeling? How does it compare to the image of her on the bird? Why might this be?*
- Now turn over to the next spread and read to the line 'Find our found family.' Ask the children how the young author, as narrator, is feeling at this point in the book and what mood she is creating for the reader. Perhaps the line **we're told** suggests she feels cynical, for example, about what older or more experienced people might tell us when we are young or struggling? Or perhaps she is conveying hope through the advice **if you are yet to find people you relate to there will be many other opportunities throughout your life to meet people who you identify with.** *How do you think she would like the children to feel as her young readers? What tone is she taking as narrator?*

- Focus on the phrase 'find our tribe'. Explore what this phrase means, facilitating the conversation carefully to mediate any inappropriate use of the word 'tribe'. The children may not know that it is a well-used phrase that is used in many contemporary contexts; your tastes, talents, gender, cultural background, beliefs etc. If the children are comfortable, open up the discussion to share where they feel they belong, with whom they identify and how this has evolved as they have grown older. Model this, sharing examples of your own sense of belonging and identity. Also note that the word 'tribe' can have negative connotations, and suggests isolation from or opposition to others. Explore how you can identify with one or more groups of people whilst still being able to relate to and empathise with others in your community or beyond. Now explore with the children how they think they might find people they relate to as they get older; what kinds of experiences they might have as adults like further education, hobbies, travel or work.
- Now turn over to the next spread, reading it aloud. How has the mood or tone of the book changed? Why is the process of finding who you belong to a **lonely** experience for some people? Refer back to the conversation you had about finding yourself in different places, like books, films, for example. Explain that some groups of people are under-represented in the media and in books. Share the latest figure from [CLPE's Reflecting Realities](#) research demonstrating the percentage of published children's books that feature protagonists of minority ethnic heritage – only 8% in 2020. What does this figure make the children feel and think about?
- Reflect on the girl in the illustration and what this figure means for her reality; how not seeing herself much reflected in book characters would affect her reading experiences and – in turn – her sense of belonging. Look more closely at the illustration and what they notice. Discuss why they think the child's interests are confined to her shadow rather than her demonstrating enjoyment of them. Reflect on how much empty space there is around her. Draw attention to her enjoyment of music, football and science and discuss how rarely she would see people who look like her being sports people or scientists. *What impact would this have on her? What does she need to see to feel that she can express her own interests or succeed in these worlds?* You might share examples of female Muslim achievement in these areas, such as:
  - [Sisterhood UK football club](#)
  - [Inspiring Muslim women in STEM](#)
  - *Muslim Girls Rise: Inspirational Champions of Our Time* by Saira Mia and Aaliyah Jaleel (Simon and Schuster)
- Children might want to create and self-publish their own non-fiction books in which children like the girl in the illustration can begin to see themselves and their interests reflected. They may also do this for themselves and each other, following their response to this spread and the themes it has raised.
- Read the next two spreads aloud and give the children time to respond to both text and illustration. *What is happening in these scenes? What are the characters doing and why?* After inviting initial impressions, you might think about how the text and illustrations work together, drawing attention to the position of the readers in each of the illustrations and the impact of noun phrases like **around curled pages, under covers, through lunchtimes in libraries, in corners of playgrounds**. Now point out the arches that the illustrator created on both pages. On the first page the reader is hidden under her sheets, the arch of the sheets forming a barrier between her and the rest of the world. On the second page, what looks like the bars of a climbing frame separate the reader from his classmates who are playing on the swings. These archways serve to emphasize the reader's isolation from others but also represent a safe space for them to read away from a world that they think does not include them. Ask if there is anyone in the class who reads at night after lights-out. *Why do you do it? How does it make you feel?*



- Explore the final line. 'Silence hides the lack of people to talk to.' *What does this mean? Why is there a 'lack of people to talk to'? What do you think they would like to say?* Allude back to previous conversations about how many children struggle to feel they belong. Invite them to share personal reflections and narratives. *How are the characters feeling? Have you ever felt like this? What happened? What would the children like to say to these characters?*
- Response to these spreads presents an ideal opportunity to explore the children's personal reading behaviours and for you to develop your classroom reading stock, environment and routines to enable more social reading experiences for the children. *Should reading always be alone? Why? why not? What makes reading enjoyable? With whom do you like reading and why? How and what do you like to read together? What If you could choose any spot, where would you read and why?*
- Turn and read the next two spreads, inviting the children's responses, in particular asking them to reflect on how they compare and contrast. *What is the author saying about what reading can do for you in a given situation? Which words convey the mood in each scenario and how is this reinforced by the illustration.* Although both contain the idea that books are a great source of solace there is a clear contrast between the function of 'the book' on each page. On the first page the book serves to calm the reader when the world around her is hostile and chaotic. On the second page the book gives her hope that there are people like her in the world and that her thoughts, feelings and desires are validated. You might review and develop the book stock in your classroom to reflect the children's reading interests and preferences, including e-books, for example, as featured here but also magazines, poetry collections, graphic novels. Visit CLPE's Core Book recommendations to support quality text choices.
- Read the next spread together then take some time to explore the ideas contained within each section. Revisit the first sentence and explore the word **protagonist**. It comes from Greek and means the person with the most importance i.e. the main character. [CLPE's Reflecting Realities research](#) has highlighted the fact that, each year, too few books are published with a main character from the BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) community. BAME characters often fade into the background as a minor character such as the sidekick or friend of the protagonist.
- Revisit the discussions you have had with the children when introducing this book and ask them to think of a protagonist from a familiar story with whom they identify and to share. Perhaps they live in homes or communities like yours; have family relationships or friendships with which you identify; enjoy the same interests and fascinations; behave in similar ways; or share recognisable characteristics?
- Now, re-read the next sentence. Who are these people who are **made of ink and simile**? *How else might you describe the friends you make when reading?* Collect and support the children to articulate their ideas through a shared writing approach e.g. They greet you from between the pages. They think in print and play with words. This is a lovely opportunity to engage the children in word play and figurative language, using similar ideas to those of the author.
- Read to the end of the second page of the spread. This final sentence is moving as it describes how devastating it can be when your identity feels invalidated and the only way you can feel that you belong is by identifying with the characters in a book; the only way you can feel love is through the characters' love for each other in a text. Explore the meaning of the phrase **by proxy**; doing something on behalf of someone else. This idea relates to the central idea of the book, that by reading the words, thoughts and experiences of others, it is almost as if we were thinking, feeling or doing it ourselves. Reading is a complex and affecting process that we want all of our children to experience.

- Turn to the next spread, reading the first line and asking the children what they think it means. Check the children's understanding of the word **society** and what this means in this context. What kind of things do the children think we all **deserve** to be taught or experience? Does the author think that, in reality, all children in society have equal opportunity to learn about their identity or sense of belonging? *Why does she think that reading is the only solution for these children? Do you agree? Why? Why not? In what way does she feel reading is like an anchor? How does she think you could you drift out of reach otherwise; from what or whom? How does this relate to earlier ideas in the book?*
- Read the next spread, pausing to reflect on and clarify the meaning being created by both text and image before engaging the children in debate and discussion around the key ideas being expressed in each section of text:
- Reading creates community, i.e. you are not the only person who has read the book you are reading so even if you don't know who else is also reading a book, you belong in the same community as them. If you do know someone who knows the stories you know, then there is great pleasure in sharing them together, talking about your shared experiences.
- However isolated and underappreciated you may feel there are other people who are like you, who are appreciated and loved - and you can find them in stories.
- Reading makes you powerful and that the world needs to make itself ready for all the children who have found their identity, confidence and value, in the pages of a book.
- All of these ideas are worth unpacking with the children. Relate each idea to the passage of text it relates to and the words that the author has chosen. This is the first time the author refers to the readers in her story as 'bookworms'. It is interesting to compare the role of the arch in this illustration compared to the one in the bedtime reading scene earlier; this time it does not hide or protect the readers in the book, it instead forms a rainbow upon which they gather. *How does this image support the mood and tone of the story at this point?*
- If you look closely at the girl reading under the rainbow, she is reading the poem 'Hope is a thing with feathers' by Emily Dickinson, an American poet born in 1830, whose poems were made famous after she died. If time allows, read this poem aloud to the children then look at it on the page together, inviting them to think about how the themes and ideas contained within it compare to the themes in *Bookworms*:

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -  
That perches in the soul -  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -  
And sore must be the storm -  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -  
And on the strangest Sea -  
Yet - never - in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb - of me.

- Emily Dickinson



- This poem makes sense of the bird image on the first spread and echoes the idea that however hard life seems, hope will see you through: hope that the author argues is fostered when reading.
- Read the next two spreads, pausing to reflect on both text and illustration. At this point in the book, support the children to recognise that these closing statements are a reiteration of the main ideas of the text. Ask the children to take a line that appeals to them and work with a partner to describe what the line is telling the reader and how this links back to what they have already read.
- The first idea: 'each publication is a peaceful protest', is the subject of the illustration on that spread. You might ask the children to consider the other two lines on this page and draw a suitable illustration to represent each idea, **Each publication is... A hand outstretched. Each publication is... A promise that it gets better.**
- Finally, explore the final two lines of the book, **A good story shows you a new world/ The right story shows that you can exist in this one.** Have a collection of books handy at this point, perhaps ones with which the children are familiar from the book corner. Browse through the books and ask the children which books they consider 'good stories' and why. *Do all of these titles present the children with the realities they experience in everyday life or are they an escape into a different world? Do the children feel well represented in their classroom book stock? What is the quality of the representation; how much agency do BAME characters have; is it positive representation or problematic? Is representation equitable across all literary forms not just traditional tales or issue stories?* You may now want to actively seek titles that reflect the realities of the children in your classroom so that they might sooner see themselves and gain a stronger sense of belonging within the literary world and amongst their peers.
- The endpaper image can be used as a template on which the children write the names of the books that matter to them on the spines of the books. Children are often used to counting up the amount of reading they do e.g. 'I have read 10 books this term', but it is more important that they are able to evaluate the quality of their reading and notice how books affect them. This exercise is not just about creating a reading record, but rather a collection of personal books in which they have seen their own identities reflected back at them, or indeed gained genuine insight into the lives of children who are different to them.
- Ask the children to give a response to the story. The groups can begin to explore their responses with the help of Aidan Chamber's '**four basic questions**'. These questions give the children accessible starting points for discussion:
  - Tell me, was there anything you liked about the book?
  - Was there anything that you particularly disliked?
  - Was there anything that puzzled you? What are the questions you would like to ask about the story?
- Come back together and support the children to summarise what key message the author wants to convey in this book, e.g. The more books that are written that reflect the diverse realities of all the children in our modern day classrooms the more children will feel validated and included in the wider world

### After reading, you could also:

- Below are some suggested starting points for writing. To get the best out of this reading experience give the children the opportunity to choose what and how they write, from a handful of options. This will encourage more authentic writing in response to what they have read:
  - Information writing that expands on the ideas in the book. This could be written as a blog post or magazine article.
  - Book reviews of texts they have already read that are meaningful to them, making personal suggestions as to their recommended readership
  - A book list of recommended reads.

- Poetry that explores the same theme or that is based on the illustrations in the book
  - A letter or email to the author or illustrator giving their response now they have read the book.
  - A speech which highlights what they have learnt and includes a call to action.
  - Handmade, self-published books that feature positive representation of a diverse range of characters or notable figures.
- You could also use [CLPE's teaching resources to work in more depth with publication \*Happy Here\*](#), an anthology of short stories and poems written and illustrated by Black British authors and illustrators, published by Knights Of – a copy of which was sent to every Primary School in the UK by Book Trust.

### Other titles by the author or illustrator that support exploration of themes from the book:

- If you are looking for similar titles to *Bookworms* or simply books that better reflect the diverse make-up of your class, then start by looking at some of the recent book award short lists, awards, such as the [Jhalak Children's & YA Prize](#) which is dedicated to British/British resident BAME writers. You might also visit [CLPE's Black History Booklist](#) for some recommendations that support teachers to build a more diverse curriculum. Keep up to date with [CLPE's Corebooks](#).

### Other books illustrated by Joelle Avelino:

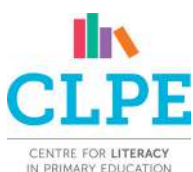
- *Coming to England* by Floella Benjamin (Macmillan)
- *The Story of Afro Hair* by K N Chimbiri (Scholastic)
- *Hey You! An Empowering Celebration of Growing up Black* by Dapo Adeola et al (Puffin)

### Other books about reading:

- *Luna Loves Library Day* by Joseph Coelho and Fiona Lumbers (Andersen Press)
- *I Do Not Like Books Anymore* by Daisy Hirst (Walker)
- *A Child of Books* by Sam Winston and Oliver Jeffers (Harper Collins)

### Other books that positively reflect diverse experiences and realities:

- *Happy Here, Ten Stories from Black British Authors and Illustrators*, introduced by Sharna Jackson (Knights Of)
- *Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong'o and Vashti Harrison (Simon and Schuster)
- *The Proudest Blue* and *The Kindest Red* by Ibtihaj Muhammad, S.K. Ali and Hatem Aly (Andersen Press)
- *The Good Turn* (Penguin) or *The High Rise Mystery* (Knights Of) by Sharna Jackson
- *Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths* by Maisie Chan (Piccadilly Press)
- *Planet Omar* (series) by Zanib Mian (Hodder)
- *The Runaway Robot* by Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Steven Lenton (Macmillan)
- *Running on Empty* by S.E. Durant (Nosy Crow)
- *Muslim Girls Rise: Inspirational Champions of Our Time* by Saira Mir and Aaliyah Jaleel (Simon and Schuster)
- *Big Book of Bad Things* by Michael Rosen (Puffin)
- *Stories for South Asian Super Girls* by Raj Kaur Khaira (Puffin)
- *I Talk Like a River* by Jordan Scott and Sydney Smith (Walker)
- You might explore the titles in [CLPE's and Spa School's Autism and Neurodiversity Booklist](#)



These resources were created in partnership with CLPE.

CLPE is a charity working to improve literacy in primary schools. Find out more about our training courses, free resources and high-quality teaching sequences. Visit: [www.clpe.org.uk](http://www.clpe.org.uk)